

MDL 1570 PLAINTIFFS' EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES

In re: Terrorist Attacks on September 11, 2001 (S.D.N.Y.)

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VIA ECF

October 7, 2020

The Honorable Sarah Netburn
Thurgood Marshall United States Courthouse
40 Foley Square, Room 430
New York, NY 10007

RE: *In Re: Terrorist Attacks on September 11, 2001*, 03 MDL 1570 (GBD) (SN)

Dear Judge Netburn:

Plaintiffs write to supplement the record in support of Plaintiffs' Motion for Reconsideration of the Court's August 27, 2020 Order.

Attached as Exhibit A is a New York Times article, published yesterday, concerning the first segment of a three-part interview of Ambassador Bandar bin Sultan al Saud on the "Saudi-controlled Al Arabiya satellite channel." In the interview, first aired on Monday, Ambassador Bandar addressed issues relating to Arab-Israeli relations and offered criticisms of the Palestinian leadership.

The New York Times indicated that "the remarks by Prince Bandar bin Sultan, a senior member of the royal family, signaled an erosion of Saudi support for the Palestinian cause," and that "[e]xperts said that Prince Bandar would not have received so much airtime on Al Arabiya...had his message not jibed with the wishes of Saudi Arabia's de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman."

The Times explained that Ambassador Bandar's comments aligned with a policy shift driven by the Crown Prince that is being promoted through state controlled media. Given the circumstances and content of the interview, the Times reported that the interview "appeared to be a way for the kingdom to shift its narrative of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without having to put it in the mouths of any current officials," and a former U.S. Ambassador to Israel emphasized that Ambassador "Bandar is an important representative of the old guard in the royal family."

Honorable Sarah Netburn

October 7, 2020

Page 2

As reflected by the New York Times' reporting and analysis, the fact that Ambassador Bandar provided an interview to a Saudi state-controlled media to promote the Crown Prince's policy positions on these issues at such a critical moment is no accident. Rather, it is new and further evidence that Ambassador Bandar and other senior members of the royal family stand ready to serve the interests of the Saudi state when asked to do so.

The parties thank Your Honor in advance for the Court's attention to this matter.

Respectfully submitted,

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cc: The Honorable George B. Daniels (via ECF)
All MDL Counsel of Record (via ECF)

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Exhibit A

Saudi Prince Accuses Palestinian Leaders of Failing Palestinians

The remarks by Prince Bandar bin Sultan, a senior member of the royal family, signaled an erosion of Saudi support for the Palestinian cause.



By Isabel Kershner and Ben Hubbard

Oct. 6, 2020

JERUSALEM — In a surprising televised monologue, a senior member of the Saudi royal family and former ambassador to Washington accused Palestinian leaders of betraying their people, signaling an erosion of Saudi support for an issue long considered sacrosanct.

“The Palestinian cause is a just cause but its advocates are failures, and the Israeli cause is unjust but its advocates have proven to be successful,” the royal, Prince Bandar bin Sultan bin Abdulaziz, said in the first episode of a three-part program, which aired Monday on the Saudi-controlled Al Arabiya satellite channel.

“That sums up the events of the last 70 or 75 years,” the prince said.

Prince Bandar’s 40-minute program on Monday and a sequel that aired Tuesday appeared to be a way for the kingdom to shift its narrative of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without having to put it in the mouths of any current officials.

Prince Bandar, 71, holds no current government position, but he served as the Saudi ambassador to Washington from 1983 to 2005, when he grew so close to the Bush family that he was jokingly called “Bandar Bush.”

He later headed the Saudi intelligence agency, and a person familiar with the relationship said that he had overseen Saudi Arabia’s clandestine relationship with Israel. Two of his children are now Saudi ambassadors, Princess Reema bint Bandar in Washington and Prince Khalid bin Bandar in London.

Experts said that Prince Bandar would not have received so much airtime on Al Arabiya, which is based in Dubai, had his message not jibed with the wishes of Saudi Arabia’s de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.



Prince Bandar’s message was likely to reflect the wishes of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Prince Bandar said his remarks were a response to the Palestinian leadership’s condemnation of the recent American-brokered agreements to normalize relations between Israel and two close Saudi allies, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

The agreements, signed at a ceremony on the White House lawn last month, laid the groundwork for the two Gulf countries to establish open diplomatic and economic ties with Israel after years of under-the-table contacts. The accords did not address the future of the Palestinians, whose demand for statehood had long been considered a prerequisite for further Israeli acceptance by the Arab world.

Prince Bandar's extraordinary indictment came amid a broader shift in Israel's relationship with Arab states, some of which now see the Israelis less as usurpers of Arab lands than as valuable partners in trade and in the rivalry with Iran.

Saudi Arabia has no diplomatic relations with Israel, and Saudi, Israeli and American officials have said that they do not expect the kingdom to normalize ties soon. But Saudi Arabia, long seen as an unwavering supporter of the Palestinians, has softened its stance toward Israel in recent years, which many in the Middle East expect could pave the way for eventual normalization.

Driving the shift is Crown Prince Mohammed, who has said that both Israelis and Palestinians have the right to their own land and that Israel's security and economic interests overlap with those of Arab states.

The kingdom greenlighted the Emirati and Bahraini moves, and the state-controlled Saudi news media praised the accords. Saudi media have also produced content recently about Israel and Jewish history in the Middle East, topics formerly considered taboo.

Palestinian officials denounced the agreements as a betrayal, and President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority accused Gulf leaders of turning their backs on the Palestinians.



President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority condemned the recent moves by the U.A.E. and Bahrain to recognize Israel. Pool photo by Alaa Badarneh

On the television program, Prince Bandar dismissed the Palestinian response as a "lowly level of discourse," adding that it was not surprising since that was how rival Palestinian factions dealt with each other.

He emphasized the decades of Saudi support for the Palestinians, which he characterized as a one-way street.

"I believe that we in Saudi Arabia, acting on our good will, have always been there for them," he said. "Whenever they asked for advice and help, we would provide them with both without expecting anything in return, but they would take the help and ignore the advice."

He added, "I think it is only fair to the Palestinian people to know some truths that have not been discussed or have been kept hidden."

The initial Palestinian response to the prince's statements was muted.

Saeb Erekat, a senior official in the Palestine Liberation Organization and its veteran chief negotiator, shared the Bandar program on Twitter, saying it was everyone's right to watch and that the Palestinian response would come after the third episode. That response, Mr. Erekat said, would be factual and "scientific" and would not demonize anybody.

Prince Bandar offered a rambling and selective history of the Palestinian struggle, saying that the Palestinians "always bet on the losing side."

His survey, interspersed with archival images and footage, cited the contacts between Haj Amin al-Husseini, the grand mufti of Jerusalem and an early Palestinian nationalist leader, and the Nazis in the 1930s, adding, "we all know what happened to Hitler and Germany."



Haj Amin al-Husseini, the grand mufti of Jerusalem, speaking with Adolph Hitler in 1941. Keystone, via Getty Images

The prince also blasted Yasir Arafat, the late Palestinian leader, for embracing the Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein after Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, despite Kuwait's record of welcoming the Palestinians. And he accused Mr. Arafat's P.L.O. of working harder to take over Jordan and Lebanon than to liberate Palestine.

While there is broad agreement that Mr. al-Husseini collaborated with the Nazis against Zionism, historians differ on the significance of his relationship with Nazi leaders.

Prince Bandar also appeared to criticize Palestinians who fled or were forced to leave during the war surrounding Israel's establishment in 1948, saying that Saudi Arabia had urged them to stay and offered them money and weapons.

In the second installment of the program on Tuesday night, he continued his diatribe about the Palestinians' history of missed opportunities, declaring, "It is not our fault that God gave them such leaders."

A Palestinian official, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of the diplomatic sensitivities involved, criticized what he called the prince's distorted history. The official said the Palestinian refugees had run for their lives, as in any war.

Martin S. Indyk, a former United States ambassador to Israel who was responsible for Middle East policy during the Clinton administration and who worked closely with Prince Bandar when he was ambassador to Washington, said the prince had never forgiven the Palestinians for siding with Saddam Hussein after he invaded Kuwait.

"For Prince Bandar, that was the original betrayal," Mr. Indyk said. "He clearly could not stand by when they accused the U.A.E. of betrayal."

Mr. Indyk said he doubted the program foreshadowed an imminent Saudi move to normalize relations with Israel.

"But Bandar is an important representative of the old guard in the Saudi royal family," he said. "So it's an indication that there will be a supportive environment for such a move," whenever the Saudi leadership decides to make it.

Isabel Kershner reported from Jerusalem, and Ben Hubbard from Beirut.

Isabel Kershner, a correspondent in Jerusalem, has been reporting on Israeli and Palestinian politics since 1990. She is the author of "Barrier: The Seam of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict." @IKershner • Facebook

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A version of this article appears in print on , Section A, Page 15 of the New York edition with the headline: Saudi Royal on TV Criticizes Palestinian Leadership